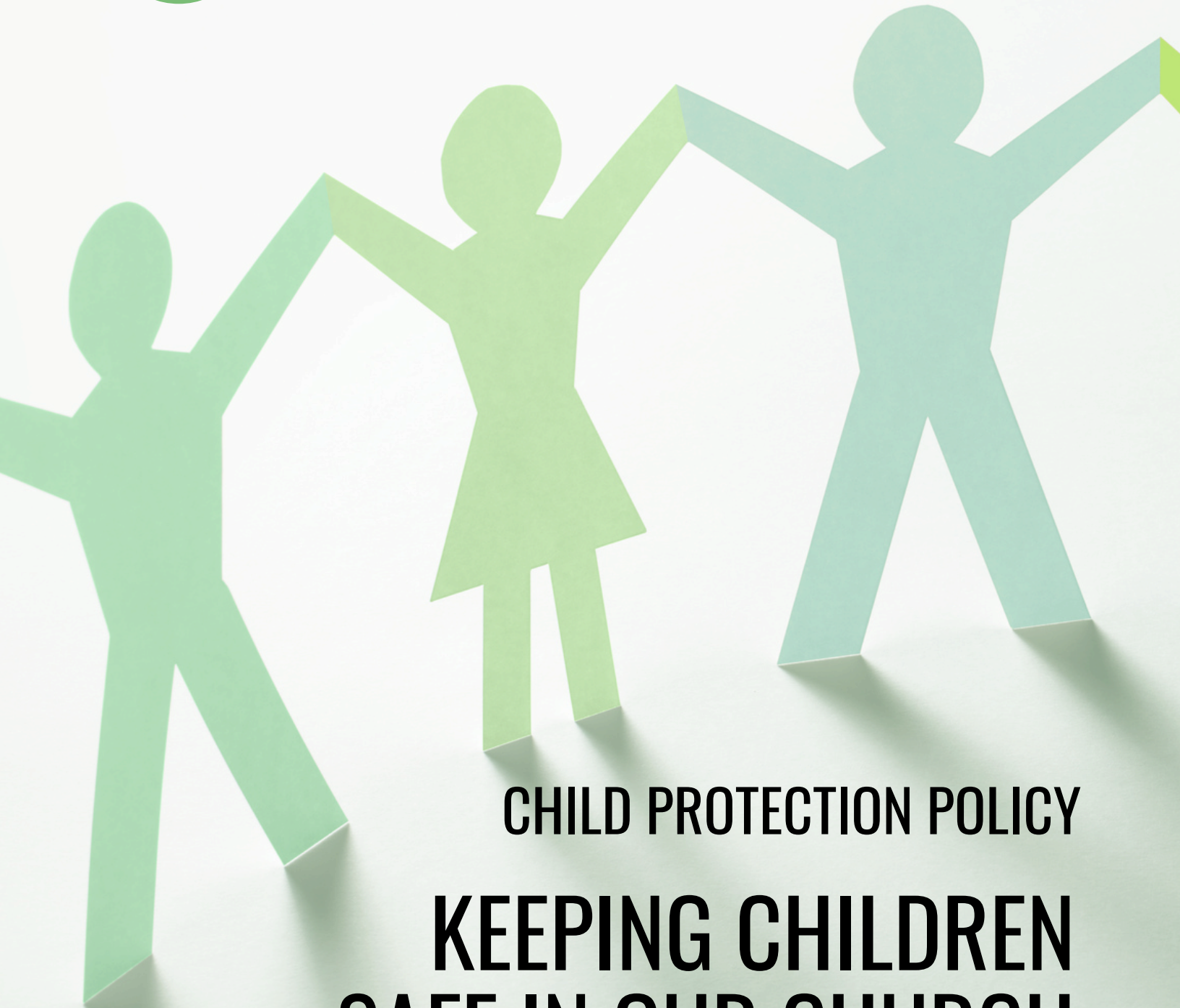




Seventh-day
Adventist Church
DAKOTA CONFERENCE



CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

**KEEPING CHILDREN
SAFE IN OUR CHURCH**

DAKOTA CONFERENCE YOUTH DEPARTMENT

WWW.DAKOTAADVENTIST.ORG

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For a digital copy or to the complete online training and a background check, visit the children's ministries tab on our webpage:



UPDATED 2024



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As a volunteer you have the privilege of working with children, one of God’s most precious gifts. Beyond protecting children from abuse, we also desire to empower volunteers to help kids grow in their experience and understanding of Jesus and His saving grace. So, we encourage you to walk with God daily, letting His love fill you up and spill over to the kids you serve.

—————”

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY & PROCEDURES

Mission

Our mission is to provide a safe, spiritual, and abuse-free environment for every child who attends programs and activities of the Dakota Conference Seventh-day Adventist churches and its entities.



Purpose

It is our purpose to prevent any form of child abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual) and to protect employees and volunteers from false allegations. Our organization will work in partnership with children and parents to promote the welfare, health, and development of children. Child protection is everyone's responsibility.

All children, whatever their age, culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin, socioeconomic status, religious belief and/or sexual identity, have the right to protection from all forms of harm and abuse.

Principle

Zero tolerance of child abuse: The Dakota Conference of Seventh-day Adventists does not tolerate child abuse. Our organization will not knowingly engage, directly or indirectly, anyone who poses an unacceptable risk to children.

Sharing responsibility for child protection: To manage risks to children, the Dakota Conference requires the active support and cooperation of ministers, leaders, and volunteers to implement the safety procedures in all activities.

DEFINITION & SIGNS OF CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse is “any treatment of a child that threatens his/her safety or leaves in his/her life physical or emotional scars.” It constitutes any inappropriate physical contact, sexual contact, or communication by any adult through the use of their authority over a child. Even if a child out of ignorance, innocence, or fear does not resist, it is still abuse. Abuse can also occur between two children.

Physical abuse is any non-accidental physical injury and can include striking, kicking, burning, biting, any action that results in a physical impairment of the child, or any injury which appears to be at variance with the explanation of the injury.

Signs include an injury or markings that do not fit the story the child or parent shares. An example might be a bruise on the back of a child’s leg that you are told is from falling off his/her bike. Typically, if a child has a bike injury, they will be hurt on their knees, elbows, or shoulders. Another example may be a burn on the arm that looks like a curling iron, but you’re told it was from falling on the hot stove, etc.

Emotional abuse is any verbal communication that harms a child, such as harsh criticism, degrading, belittling, threats, disparaging name-calling, unnecessary shouting, demeaning terminology, unrealistic demands for perfection, violent or obscene language, etc.

Signs include depression, anxiety, withdrawal, or aggressive behavior.

Sexual abuse violates a child’s sexual privacy whether it be visually, by verbal remarks, or by fondling. It includes fondling of any intimate parts of the child’s body; oral, genital and/or anal penetration by any foreign object; oral, genital or anal sexual intercourse; telling a child to masturbate; exhibiting or showing any genital parts to a child; allowing a child to witness or watch any forms of sexual activity; showing any pornographic materials; etc.

Signs include a child exhibiting anxiety, chronic stomach pain, headaches, withdrawal, fear, depression, unexplained anger, rebellion, nightmares, bedwetting, falling grades, cruelty to animals, bullying, being bullied, fire setting, self-harm, sexual behavior and language that are not age-appropriate, using alcohol or drugs use at an early age, etc. (This is not meant to be an exhaustive list and does not include physical signs as they are not a common sign of child sexual abuse.)

Neglect is the failure of a parent or other person with responsibility for the child to provide needed food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision to the degree that the child’s health, safety, and well-being are threatened with harm.

Signs include a child who is unbathed, wearing dirty clothing, withdrawn, hungry, hair is not brushed or is tangled, or basic needs are not met.



Procedures – Tips to Keep Kids Safe

The local church should take reasonable steps to safeguard children engaged in church-sponsored activities by choosing individuals with high spiritual and moral backgrounds as leaders and participants in programs for children. Jesus placed a high value on the protection of children (Matthew 18:1-6); therefore, child protection is an essential element in all church-sponsored children's activities. Volunteers will be expected to conduct themselves, at all times, in accordance with biblical principles.

In addition to the Expected Volunteer Conduct Code & Guidelines, all volunteers are expected to adhere to the following local church rules:

- S** Screen & train volunteers
- A** Appropriate verbal communication and physical boundaries
- F** Follow the two-person rule
- E** Engage, support, and supervise youth interactions
- K** Kids' privacy is to be respected
- I** Implement safe travel
- D** Discipline kids appropriately
- S** Supervise minors at all times

EXPECTED VOLUNTEER CONDUCT CODE

The key to effective supervision is to consider each activity, outing, or field trip and provide the best-qualified volunteers possible, in ample numbers, to keep youth safe. The top priority in child supervision is to “never let children out of one’s sight.” Claims filed are filled with tragic stories of injuries that happened when children were left unsupervised.

Provide a minimum of two qualified volunteers (those with specific knowledge of the particular activity, including training, certification, degrees, etc.). Depending on the specific activity (museum visit, swimming, hiking, etc.), qualifications and numbers will vary.

The benefit of having two means a volunteer is always present. In the case of emergency, someone may need to go for help while the other volunteer remains behind to watch the kids in their care. In addition, supervision in numbers helps to prevent child abuse or accusations of child abuse. Where programs include youth that are physically or mentally challenged, additional supervision will be required.

In addition, when supervising groups of mixed genders, ensure you have at least one male and one female staff member.

Variables that increase the need for more supervision...

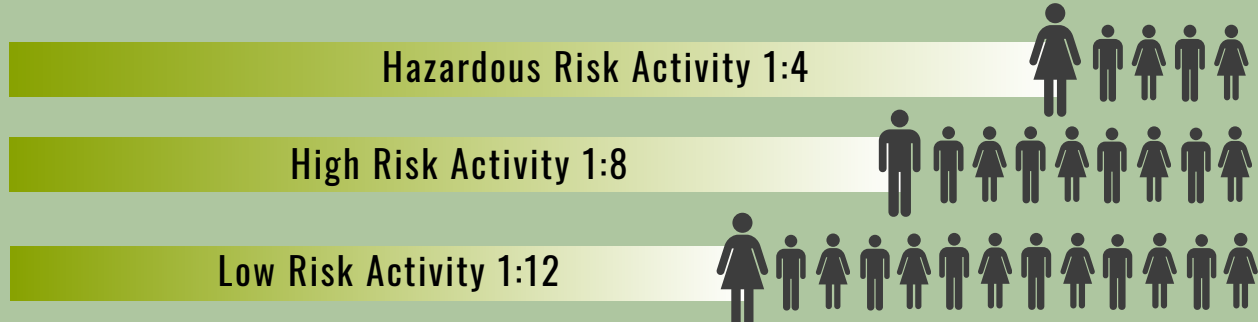
Environmental Hazards: geographic features such as bodies of water that children may fall in, strong currents in areas where youth are swimming, wooded areas where children may become lost, etc.

Experience & Qualifications of Volunteers: maturity and judgment, experience and knowledge, training, etc.

Skill Level of Children: age, number of persons, physical condition, disabilities, etc.

How Much Risk the Activity Involves: Adventist Risk Management recommends that hazardous risk activities, such as mountain climbing, require one adult for each four children. A high risk activity, such as a field trip, requires one adult for each eight children, while a low risk activity, such as sitting in class, would require one adult for each 12 children.

RECOMMENDED STAFF-TO-CHILD RATIOS



How many volunteers you have supervising activities depends on both the level of risk involved with the activity and the needs of the children.

01 All employees and volunteers MUST complete the child protection training and background check (every three years). Individuals unwilling to support the volunteer screening guidelines and practices should not be allowed to serve. To verify if your volunteer has completed the required pieces, call the Conference Office.

02 New members who desire to work with children and youth must have been an active member of the local church for a minimum of six (6) months or have been known by the organization for a minimum of six (6) months before beginning to work with children.

03 At all times, provide appropriate adult supervision. Never leave a child or group of children for whom you are responsible unattended.

04 Always have at least one other adult, eighteen (18) years of age or older, (the “two-person rule”) to help with the supervision of children. If you find yourself in a situation where you are the only adult present, do your best not to allow yourself to be alone with one child. This protects the child and protects you from possible allegations.

In an emergency where it is necessary to be alone with a child, the child’s parent should be contacted. If contact

cannot be made with a parent, another responsible adult should be informed immediately, by telephone, if necessary.

05 Volunteers should not travel alone with a child/young person. If only one adult is available, there should be a minimum of two children present for the entire journey. In an emergency where it is necessary to travel alone with a child, the child’s parent or guardian should be informed as soon as possible.

06 Individuals convicted of committing physical or sexual abuse may not work or serve as volunteers or staff in any church-sponsored activity or program for children.

07 Any behavior, which seems abusive or inappropriate, shall be reported to the pastor or elder immediately. If you believe the behavior is reportable to authorities, please make the report as soon as possible. You should be aware of the signs and symptoms of child abuse and have knowledge of the legal requirements for reporting suspected cases of abuse.

08 Parents are responsible for supervising their children before and after church-sponsored children’s programs and making sure that their children are picked up at the appointed time. Be sure to effectively communicate this expectation with them.

09 No child shall be released to an older child or permitted to go to the restroom accompanied by an older child, unless the child is a sibling.

10 Provide extra care when taking small children to the restroom. Take another adult along or leave the door open. If a child needs assistance with going to the bathroom, a parent should be called to help their child.

11 Care should be taken that no child/young person is on church property without two adults being present.

12 A disproportionate amount of time should not be spent with any child or group of children.

13 Under no circumstances may volunteers give alcohol, tobacco, or drugs to children or young people.

14 Alcohol, tobacco, or drugs must not be used by any individual on church premises or during a church-sponsored activity.

15 Only age-appropriate activities should be used when working with children and young people. This includes language and material on media/electronic devices (computers, cameras, phones, internet, video, etc.). Sexually explicit or pornographic material is never acceptable.

16 Always ask a child's permission before physically touching him/her anywhere, even when responding to an injury or problem. This is especially true for any areas that would normally be covered by a T-shirt and/or shorts. (If an injury is within this area, make sure another adult works with you as care is provided.)

17 Volunteers must not engage in inappropriate physical contact of any kind—including rough physical play, physical reprimand, and horseplay.

18 Affirm children with appropriate touching by keeping hugs brief and “shoulder-to-shoulder” or “side-to-side.” Always keep hands at (not below) the shoulder level. For small children who like to sit on laps, encourage them to sit next to you.



19 Any discipline administered shall occur within the visual contact of another adult. Any form of physical punishment of children is not permissible under any circumstances. Refrain from verbal attacks. “Time outs” or “sit-in-that-chair” may be helpful discipline methods to use with children.

20 Children’s need for privacy should always be respected. Privacy must be taken when young people are in locations such as changing areas, swimming pools, showers, and restrooms.

21 Participate in Conference online training for child protection once every three years and keep your account current.

22 Cooperate with church leadership in conducting children and youth ministries by being a volunteer who is loving, kind, firm, and professional. Working with children and youth is not only a privilege; it is also a serious responsibility that must be approached with utmost care.

23 Photographs of children or young people must never be taken while they are in changing areas (for example, in a locker room or bathing facility).

24 Participate in orientation and training programs conducted by the church.

TRIPS

All trips, meetings, and overnight activities conducted off the church premises must be pre-approved by the church board.

All minor attendees must have a signed parental permission slip, as well as an emergency medical treatment release form, for each outing.

All trips, including day trips and overnight stays, need careful advance planning, including adequate provision for safety regarding transport, facilities, activities, and emergencies.

Appropriate auto insurance should be in place prior to any trip.



TRIPS

Adequate liability insurance through the Dakota Conference of Seventh-day Adventists should be in place prior to any trip (i.e. trampoline park, rock climbing, zip lining, etc.).

A copy of the trip itinerary and contact telephone numbers for leaders should be made available to parents and guardians.

There must be adequate, gender-appropriate supervision for boys and girls.

Arrangements and procedures must be put in place to ensure that rules are followed and appropriate boundaries are maintained.

The provision of appropriate and adequate sleeping arrangements should be ensured in advance of an overnight trip.

Sleeping areas for boys and girls should be separate and supervised by two adults of the same gender as the group being supervised.

At no time should an adult be alone with a child/young person in a confined space (two-person rule).

These policies and guidelines have been adapted from the North American Division working policy and may be different in some areas. The Dakota Conference has implemented certain policies and guidelines with the intent of enhancing the safety and welfare of our children.

12- and 15-Passenger Vans

The use of 12- or 15-passenger vans is not approved for use for church or school-sponsored events by Adventist Risk Management (ARM). New ARM requirement: wheelbase no longer than 135 inches and overall length not over 225 inches. (Newer 12-passenger vans are built on the 15-passenger frame; therefore, they are unable to be used for transporting passengers for church or school without first checking with the Dakota Conference Office.)

Find more information from Adventist Risk Management here:
www.bit.ly/15passengervan



DEALING WITH A CONVICTED SEX OFFENDER

What should church leaders do when they learn that a convicted sex offender is attending church?



UNPREPARED

This is a problem that poses a significant “dilemma” to a church pastor who wishes to make his church safe for members, particularly children, and also wishes to deal with the offender in a “redemptive” manner and afford him/her the opportunity to worship. Even so, it is important for the pastor to know that sex offenders are often individuals who cannot be cured, who are driven to repeat their conduct, and many times sincerely hold a persuasive conviction that they will not repeat their offense.

If a person abuses a child on church property or at church functions and its leaders know, or should have known, that the person is a sex offender, the church will have a difficult case to defend. The church will need to demonstrate that it exercised a high degree of care and vigilance in the supervision of the individual.

Each year, the Dakota Conference requires that every church vote on and adopt the *Church/Participation Agreement - Child Protection Plan*, as well as sign and submit the “Annual Board Decision” page. This document

can be accessed by the pastors from our webpage.

Remember, individuals who are known to have committed physical or sexual abuse may NOT work or serve as a volunteer or staff in our churches or schools.

The following guidelines have been developed for implementation:

01 The church pastor should first ask the individual to cease attending church until they can work through the required protocols for an offender to attend church. The person does not have to be cut off entirely. The pastor or other church leadership can meet with such a person off the church premises to provide spiritual support.

02 The pastor must contact the Dakota Conference Office for further instructions. A convicted sex offender should at no time attend one of our churches without first going through the participation agreement process.

03 The church leaders can permit an offender to attend church and participate in certain activities once they have gone through the participation agreement process.

04 Any church knowing a sex offender is transferring to or attending another church needs to notify the new leadership of the previous history. They should also notify the Dakota Conference Office of the change in attendance.

If the offender is a minor, the agreement must be signed by his or her parents. The church's legal counsel should review the agreement.

Dealing with child sex offenders who attend church services and other functions should be done aggressively and with the Dakota Conference Office's assistance. In most cases, the offender has a criminal record. Be sure to determine and share with the Conference Office whether there are any parole or probation conditions to his/her release. Consider contacting the parole or probation officer or prosecuting attorney who pursued the criminal action for advice.

DEALING WITH INDIVIDUALS WHERE ALLEGATIONS HAVE BEEN MADE

If it is alleged that an individual has shown inappropriate conduct toward a child, the following guidelines have been developed for implementation:

01 Do not try to handle the situation yourself or talk to the alleged offender before you call the Department of Health Services (DHS), Child Protective Services (CPS), or law enforcement.

02 Report to your church pastor or first elder. The pastor or first elder is to notify Conference administration of the situation.

03 Do not allow any further contact between the child and alleged offender unless CPS tells you it is all right.

04 Remove the individual from all church responsibilities until evaluated. The church should respect the rights of all parties involved in the alleged incident and treat all matters concerning the situation discreetly, confidentially, and in accordance with local Child Protective Services.

05 Provide appropriate supervision for the individual when they attend any church event.

child abuse. 1. emotional harm inflicted on sexual molestation; esp., a p act or failure to act that resu

SEXUAL ABUSE FACTS

Research suggests that one in 20 men may have sexually molested children, and between 5% and 20% of the individuals who offend children are females. Also, 40% of children who are abused are abused by older children or teens. There is no easy way to identify an offender at a glance. Therefore, the only way your children can be kept safe is for you to know where your child is and what he/she is doing at all times!

Offenders who primarily target girls abuse an average of 12 girls before being apprehended.

Offenders who primarily target boys abuse an average of 30 boys before being apprehended.

One out of every three to five girls and one out of every six to eight boys are molested prior to their 18th birthday.

If an alleged offender is causing custodial interference (interfering with parental control of the child), seek assistance from law enforcement.

Sex offenders commit an average of 120 separate crimes before they are caught.

There are offenders living in all neighborhoods and communities.

Being sexually abused is not the primary cause of pedophilia; if it were, we would have more female offenders than male.

75% of offenders started offending prior to age 18. The average age of a first offense is 14.

The Internet

- The internet offers offenders another avenue to contact and approach children.
- It will cause some people to cross the line for the first time in their lives.
- Cyber sex will become addictive for some people.
- The internet is exposing children to more, and worse, deviant forms of sexuality.

The Internet, cont.

- 70% of children, eight to 18 years of age, are accidentally exposed to pornography via the internet.
- One in five children who use the internet are approached online by an adult seeking sex.

How Sexual Abuse is Most Likely to Occur

- 75% of cases involve someone the child knows: parents, step-parents, boyfriends, in-laws, grandparents, uncles, friends of the family, neighbors, etc.
- 25% of cases involve people who work in youth service organizations, such as sports, youth clubs, camps, churches, and daycare programs.
- 5% of cases involve strangers.

Sexual Behavior Clues

- Adults who seem preoccupied with the sexual development of children or make sexualized comments to or about children
- Adults who act “flirty” around children or teens
- Adults who act jealous of children or teens’ relationships with each other
- Adults who “accidentally” touch private parts



Any behavior, which seems abusive or inappropriate, should be reported to the pastor or elder immediately.

“Boundary Violation” Clues

- Adults who engage in frequent physical contact with children (wrestling, tickling, horseplay, hugging, or lap sitting)
- Adults who do not allow children privacy or “walk in on them” while they are dressing or using the bathroom
- Adults who act like children or allow children to do questionable or inappropriate things
- Adults who “override” the parents or whom children like for reasons parents do not understand

Child/Teen-Focused Clues

- Adults who work with children but also spend their free time doing “special” things with children
- Adults who do not have children but seem to know a lot about the current fads or music popular with children or teens

“Too Good to Be True” Clues

- Adults who buy children special gifts for no reason
- Adults who want to take children on outings that involve being alone with them
- Adults who seem able to infiltrate family/social functions or are always available to baby-sit

And Finally...

- Remember, probably 90% or more of the people you know are good folks!
- Adults, not children, are responsible for the safety and welfare of children.
- If a child says he/she has been abused, it is likely true; believe them.

Information was collected from: Cory Jewell Jensen—former co-director, Center for Behavioral Intervention / Beaverton, Oregon 97005, www.guardchild.com/statistics/, www.childwelfare.gov, www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/child-maltreatment,



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ABOUT REPORTING ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Reporting is considered a request for an assessment of a suspected incident of abuse or neglect. Remember a report is not an established fact of guilt, but rather a request for assessment of the safety and condition of a child. It is the beginning of a helping process for children and families. All citizens are encouraged to report suspected cases to DHS, CPS, or law enforcement. Over 25% of the substantiated cases of child abuse are reported by concerned citizens who are not required to report. Failure to report is a violation and carries a hefty monetary penalty. Mandatory reporters have also been successfully sued for damages in civil court for failing to report.

Q AM I A MANDATORY REPORTER?

If you are reading this booklet, you are a mandatory reporter.

Q WHO MUST REPORT?

Any person who has firsthand reasonable cause to believe that a child has suffered abuse or neglect should report such incident.

Q WHO DO I CONTACT IF I SUSPECT CHILD ABUSE?

A person making a report of child abuse shall make an oral report by telephone or otherwise to a local Child Welfare office of DHS or CPS, to the division's designee, or to a law enforcement agency within the county where the person making the report is at the time of the contact. A law enforcement agency can be defined as a local police department, county sheriff, or county juvenile department.

North Dakota State Reporting:

1.833.958.3500

www.hhs.nd.gov/cfs/cps

South Dakota State Reporting:

1.877.244.0864

www.dss.sd.gov/childprotection/default.aspx

Q HOW DO I RESPOND TO A CHILD WHO REPORTS ABUSE TO ME?

Believe the child if she/he reports sexual abuse. It is rare for a child to lie about sexual abuse. Tell the child

you believe them and that you are going to contact people who can help. Let the child talk if they want to. The child will need to tell their story in detail later, so do not press the child for details. Only ask open-ended questions like, "Tell me more." Do not investigate the disclosure. Remember, you need only to suspect abuse to make a report. Do not display horror, shock, or disapproval of parents, child, or the situation. Do not place blame or make judgments about the parent or child.

Q WHAT INFORMATION DO I NEED TO REPORT?

If possible, report the names and addresses of the child and parent; the child's age; the type and extent of the abuse, as well as any previous evidence of abuse; the explanation given for the abuse; and any other information that will help establish the cause of abuse or identify the abuser.

Q WILL MY REPORT BE CONFIDENTIAL?

The reporter's identity will remain confidential to the full extent allowable by law. If court action is initiated, the reporting person may be called as a witness, or the court may order that the reporter's name be disclosed. Only people with firsthand knowledge of the child's situation can provide testimony proving that abuse has occurred.



Q SHOULD I TELL THE PARENTS OF MY REPORT?

It is best not to contact parents about your suspicions before making a report. Doing so could result in retribution against the child, destruction of evidence, or fleeing of the perpetrator with or without the victim. Under some conditions, you may need to maintain open communication with the parent. When this happens, never accuse a parent of wrongdoing, and explain that you are legally responsible to report.

Q WHAT HAPPENS AFTER I REPORT?

Child Protective Services (CPS) follows a process that includes six possible decision points for every child abuse report.

The process begins with screening. If the information indicates possible abuse, a caseworker assesses the situation by getting more in-depth information and determines whether abuse occurred and whether a child is at risk of further harm.

If a child has been abused or neglected, CPS and law enforcement decide, with family help if possible, whether the child can safely remain at home. Risk factors and needs of the child and family are assessed.

A case is closed when CPS or DHS is no longer needed to keep the child safe.

Q WHO CAN I CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION ON CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT?

If you need more information on child abuse and neglect, contact your local Child Welfare branch office of the Department of Human Services.

North Dakota State Reporting:

1.833.958.3500

www.hhs.nd.gov/cfs/cps

South Dakota State Reporting:

1.877.244.0864

www.dss.sd.gov/childprotection/default.aspx

For the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists' *Statement on Nurture and Protection of Children*, please visit the website: www.adventist.org/official_statements/nurture-and-protection-of-children/

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Thank you for taking the time to read this important information. Keeping children safe and growing their relationship with Jesus is our number one priority! We hope these policies are clear and easy to understand; however, if you need further assistance, please feel free to contact the Dakota Conference Office. We are here to partner with you in ministry.

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*Be on guard.
Stand firm in the faith.
Be courageous.
Be strong.
And do everything
with LOVE.*

1 Corinthians 16:13-14



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